



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 31, 2010

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### **SUPERVISORS RIDLEY-THOMAS AND KNABE CALL FOR PLAN TO ENSURE TIMELY IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMPLY WITH STATE LAW TO REPORT CHILD DEATHS**

**LOS ANGELES** — Noting several challenges faced by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in properly interpreting child deaths, Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Don Knabe today urged the County's Chief Executive Officer to work with the necessary departments to ensure compliance with SB39, a state law that requires public disclosure of child fatalities resulting from abuse or neglect.

The challenges faced by DCFS were released Monday in a detailed report by the Office of Independent Review (OIR) on the status of the County's implementation of SB39.

"The OIR report offers many helpful recommendations to improve the County's SB39 responsiveness," the Supervisors wrote in their joint motion.

The Supervisors expressed concern, however, that the OIR report does not recommend a single County office to oversee the timely and accurate compliance with SB39.

Among the OIR's findings were the inconsistent rulings by various segments of DCFS in its efforts to "coordinate the assembly, assessment, and evaluation of information necessary to make a determination in a manner which is comprehensive, consistent and accurate."

"The Office of Independent Review's report makes it clear there was a dysfunctionally wide range of interpretations of SB 39, the law requiring disclosure of

child death records for which I voted as a member of the State Senate,” the Supervisor said.

The Supervisors added that “while the OIR’s recommendations put the County on the path to better inform the public, it remains unclear who is ultimately responsible for deciding when and if a case is subject to SB39’s disclosure requirements.

Another challenge identified by the OIR was that once a child fatality qualified as the subject of public disclosure, the records in the case are subject to certain redactions. However, all too often in recent cases the law enforcement agencies have placed blanket holds on disclosure.

More often than not, holds are made because the SB39 material is not shared with law enforcement officials in a timely manner, or are not reviewed to ensure that the reason for non-disclosure still exists.

The Supervisor said he will be exploring ways to enhance oversight of DCFS’s classification of SB 39 decisions and find ways to ensure the District Attorney, Sheriff’s Department and police agencies do a better job of working with DCFS to provide information without compromising criminal investigations.

“This is not one department’s load to bear,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “A blanket objection to releasing information, when invoked to protect a police investigation, must not be used to smother information to which the public has a right to know.”

The Board instructed the CEO to return with a written report within 30 days and to develop quarterly reports on the progress of efforts to achieve compliance with state law.

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